

Benjamin Miller House  
1524 28th Street, N.W.  
Washington (Georgetown)  
District of Columbia

HABS No. DC-247

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PHOTOGRAPHS  
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey  
Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation  
National Park Service  
Department of the Interior  
Washington, D.C. 20240

## BENJAMIN MILLER HOUSE

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DC  
GEO  
117-

Location: 1524 28th Street, N. W. (Georgetown), west side of 28th Street (formerly Montgomery Street) approximately 120 feet south of Q Street (formerly Stoddert Street), Washington, D. C.

Present Owner: Mrs. Robert F. Whitehead

Present Occupant: Mr. and Mrs. John Wainwright

Present Use: Private residence

Statement of Significance: Benjamin Miller, the master carpenter of the Potomac Aqueduct, built this modest frame dwelling which is distinguished by a Greek Revival front porch.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

## A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: The house was completed by 1846 since Deed WB 128 folio 184 dated October 10, 1846 mentions: "dwelling house thereon." (This could not refer to the Dodge House which is on lot 264 since that house was not begun until 1850.) The house was begun sometime after June, 1843, the date that Bennett Clement's right to remove the crops expired.
2. Architect: Probably Benjamin Miller.
3. Original and subsequent owners: The building is located in Square 1267, lot 808 (formerly parts of lots 254 and 255). The following is an incomplete chain of title to the property. The references are to the Recorder of Deeds, Washington, D. C.

1804 Deed. July 16, 1804, recorded January 5, 1805 in Liber M folio 57  
Thomas Beall et ux Nancy  
to  
Thomas Sim Lee  
"...part of a tract of land called the Rock of Dumbarton...to contain seventeen lots..." (includes lots 254 and 255).

1825 Deed. February 4, 1825, recorded February 12, 1825 in  
Liber WB 11 folio 351  
Benjamin Ringgold  
to  
Richard Burgess

HABS  
DC  
GEO  
117-

1838 Deed of Correction. August 21, 1838, recorded  
September 18, 1838 in  
Liber WB 67 folio 141  
Richard Burgess and Ann Burgess  
Clement Cox  
The Farmers and Mechanics Bank  
Robert Read  
to  
Clement Cox  
Recites that in Liber WB 44, folios 246-252 of  
the land record of the District of Columbia  
Richard Burgess did bargain, sell and convey to  
Clement Cox certain parcels of ground in George-  
town including lots 254 and 255.

1840 Deed. February 21, 1840, recorded March 21, 1840 in  
Liber WB 79 folio 285  
Charles Carroll et ux Mary  
Molly D. Lee and Thomas Sim Lee  
Mary E. Horsey  
Ann C. Horsey  
Outbridge Horsey, Jr.  
Mary D. G. Ringgold  
to  
Bennett Clements  
Northern half of lots 252, 253 and 255

1842 Deed. July 30, 1842, recorded August 3, 1842 in  
Liber WB 92 folio 233  
Bennett Clements  
to  
Benjamin F. Miller  
includes parts of lots 254 and 255  
"...saving excepting and reserving to the said  
Bennett Clements the present growing and severed  
crops on said ground with the privilege of re-  
moving the same at any time before the first day  
of June next..."

1846 Deed. October 10, 1846, recorded October 17, 1846 in  
Liber WB 128 folio 149  
Benjamin F. Miller and Selena  
to  
Francis Dodge

Parts of lots 254 and 255 and all of lots 264 and 265 "Together with the dwelling house and other improvements upon the same."  
Consideration: \$2,500

HABS  
DC  
GEO  
117-

- 1872 Deed. March 15, 1872, recorded April 1, 1872 in  
Liber 676 folio 264  
Robert P. Dodge et ux Caroline  
to  
Philip A. Darneille  
Beginning at the southeast corner of lot 264 on  
the west side of Montgomery Street; south 77'  
(180' from West Street); thence west 120' to the  
west line of 254; north 77'; east 120' to the  
beginning.
- 1875 Deed. July 20, 1875, recorded July 23, 1875 in  
Liber 791 folio 321  
Philip C. Darneille et ux Emillie M.  
to  
William Tyler  
77' on Montgomery Street, parts of lots 254 and 255
- 1876 Trustees Deed. January 10, 1876, recorded January  
17, 1876 in  
Liber 810 folio 128  
William L. Dunlop, Trustee  
to  
Nannie B. Blackford
- 1877 Deed. November 15, 1877, recorded November 21, 1877 in  
Liber 872 folio 195  
Nannie B. Blackford  
to  
Reuben Daw  
Conveys the south 19' of the 77' on Montgomery Street
- 1878 Deed. June 25, 1878, recorded July 10, 1878 in  
Liber 890 folio 315  
Charles Cragin, Trustee  
to  
Charles Cragin  
Sold for default under trust of Nannie Blackford  
58' on Montgomery Street
- 1880 Deed. June 9, 1880, recorded April 16, 1881 in  
Liber 967 folio 90  
Charles Cragin  
to  
Mary Cragin  
Charles H. Cragin, Jr.

HABS  
DC  
680  
117-

- 1918 Deed. May 1, 1918, recorded May 6, 1918 in  
Liber 4072 folio 162  
Charles H. Cragin, Jr.  
to  
Edith J. Goode
- 1920 Deed. July 30, 1920, recorded August 18, 1920 in  
Liber 4417 folio 142  
Edith J. Goode  
to  
Hazel Davis
- 1923 Deed. June 13, 1923, recorded June 14, 1923 in  
Liber 4990 folio 268  
Hazel G. Davis  
to  
Robert F. Whitehead and Edmonia Whitehead

4. Original plans, construction etc.: None found.
5. Alterations and additions: The house has undergone many minor changes and additions, all either on the interior or at the rear. On the facade the first floor casement windows are probably not original.

B. Historical Events and Persons Connected with the Structure:

1. Benjamin F. Miller:

Benjamin Miller, the builder of the house, was the superintendent of the Potomac Aqueduct. (See HABS No. DC-166.) Miller was originally from New York and came to Washington specifically for the aqueduct project. He is mentioned in House Document Number 459, 25th Congress, second session. In a report dated July 2, 1838, a letter from the Secretary of War transmitting Captain Turnbull's report on the survey and construction of the Potomac Aqueduct, dated January 1, 1836, mentions this about Miller:

Previous to the commencement of this dam a sawmill had been contrived by Mr. B. F. Miller, the master carpenter and superintendent of the works, an experienced millwright and a man of great mechanical ingenuity. It was erected upon the float of one of the steam scows and was driven by the steam engine at work upon the pumps....

Jackson, p. 130, mentions that "Benjamin F. Miller, the master-carpenter and superintendent of the work /the Potomac Aqueduct// invented a model, which having been

tested in the presence of the directors and board of engineers, was adopted...."

HABS  
DC  
GEO  
117-

2. Washington directories provide the following tenant information:

1858-1866	Edward Cummins, Treas. Dept. h. 87 Montgomery
1865	_____ Daws, clerk Pay Dept, bds. 87 Montgomery
1893	Charles C. Darwin, libr. geol. survey
1903-1914	Charles C. Darwin, geol. survey
	Gertrude Darwin, asst. libr. Congr.
1915-1917	Charles C. Darwin
	Gertrude Darwin
	Mary Darwin
1918	William L. Boyden
1919-1920	Charles C. Darwin
1921	F. D. Davis
1922-1924	Ross E. Collins
1925-1948	Robert F. Whitehead

No directories are presently available for the 1840's; it is therefore impossible to determine exactly when Miller himself occupied the house.

3. Volumes of The Elite List: A Compilation of Selected Names of Residents of Washington City, D. C. and Ladies Shopping Guide give this additional tenant information:

1888-1889	Mrs. E. J. Brewer
1890-1892	Mrs. E. J. Brewer
	Mr. Madison M. Brewer
	Miss Margaret Halsey Brewer

4. Mrs. Robert F. Whitehead:

During the Second World War, Mrs. Whitehead ran a nursery school for two-and three-year-old children at the house. She usually had ten or fifteen students, who played outside in the back yard, rarely entering the house except in case of inclement weather. They were allowed only in the back room behind the kitchen, where large metal hooks, used to support swings, are still visible in the beams.

5. Notes on alterations:

Charles Cragin applied for a building permit on October 26, 1903, and received permission to make the following repairs:

to cover the side porch roof with tin, to repair the fence and to connect the cellar with steps

from the interior of the house. (Permit 769-1/2, District of Columbia Department of Licenses and Inspection.)

Other early building permits indicate repairs made on the shingle roof (Permit 1524, 1897) and a repair of the cornice (Permit 2481-1/2, 1908).

C. Sources of Information:

1. Old views: Two photographs taken about 1918 were provided by Miss Edith J. Goode, a former owner.

2. Bibliography:

- a. Primary and unpublished sources:

Building Permits, Department of Licenses and Inspection, Washington, D. C.

District of Columbia Deed Books, Recorder of Deeds, Washington, D. C.

- b. Secondary and published sources:

The Elite List: A Compilation of Selected Names of Residents of Washington City, D. C. and Ladies Shopping Guide. Vols. 1888-1889 and 1890-1892. Washington, D. C.: The Elite Publishing Company, 1888-.

Jackson, Richard P. The Chronicles of Georgetown from 1751 to 1878. Washington, 1878.

Washington Directory. Vols. 1858-1948. Washington, D. C.

Prepared by Ellen J. Schwartz  
Architectural Historian  
Commission of Fine Arts  
August 1969

## PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: This simple vernacular frame house, updated with a Greek Revival porch, is set well back on its

HABS  
DC  
GEO  
117-

own lot and is one of the few detached houses of modest pretensions remaining in Georgetown.

2. Condition of fabric: The house is well maintained, but is in fair-to-poor structural condition. Some floor boards on the second floor have broken through, and the south-east living-room has recent joist bracing in the basement.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: This rectangular house measures about 30' north-south by 28', and has a rear ell on the west which measures about 33' x 17'. The house has a three-bay facade and two stories.
2. Foundations: The foundations of the house are concrete-covered brick from 2' to 3' high depending on grade. At the rear near the bulkhead the brick is exposed, revealing common bond with headers every five rows. In the south basement the brick walls (which here do not look very old) are in common bond with headers every 12 rows. In the ell, the first two rooms have a brick foundation 2' tall in common bond. The mortar here appears to have bits of shell in it, and when examined on a very damp morning, had little more cohesiveness than packed sand. The third room of the ell has a 1-1/2' common bond brick foundation in regular mortar.
3. Wall construction: The house and ell are clapboarded and painted white. The front and south sides of the house have 4" wide clapboards; on the rear the clapboards are 5" at the bottom and about 7" toward the eaves. On both parts of the ell the clapboards are about 5" wide, although they are not continuous from the east to the west sections. The corners of the house are finished with an inset strip. On the ell there is an overlapping piece at each face of the corner.
4. Framing: Presumably stud walls.
5. Porches, stoops, bulkheads, etc.: The most notable feature of the front facade is the Greek Revival porch. This measures 8'-9" x 5'-1-1/2" and is reached by four risers with box sides. (On the south these are of vertical match boarding with one bead; on the north, flush and shiplap boarding.) The tread is 6'-4" long. A pedimented roof with a plain architrave is supported at the front by two well proportioned Doric columns (21 flutes) and by two pilasters, each 11" wide, against the house. The porch ceiling has twelve rectangular panels, the center row of



four being as wide as the doorway. On the west side of the house, near the south corner, is a bulkhead with cement covered sides and a bluestone sill. It is closed by double doors, each composed of two 10-1/2" boards (single bead).

The ell has two small porches which, according to an old photograph, were at one time continuous along the south side of the ell. The first, off the kitchen to the south, is at the corner of the house and ell. It measures 5'-8-1/2" wide, and about the same east-west. As now altered, it is reached by 3-1/2" risers, the lowest one of brick. Its ceiling has match boarding and the corner post is square with chamfered edges; the balusters are square. The second porch, off the second room of the ell, is only 3'-3" x 3'-9" (east-west) and is reached by four modern risers. On the roof of the kitchen porch is a small second-floor porch with simple railing.

6. Chimneys: The main house has four rectangular brick chimneys with a single projecting brick course near the top. These are now covered with concrete. They are located about half way up the east and west slopes of the gable roof, near the north and south walls. A modern chimney, with a projecting terra cotta flue, is located at the north wall of the ell in the second room.

7. Openings:

- a. Doorways and doors: The front entrance has a six-panel wooden door with four-pane sidelights and a wooden panel below at each side. There is a narrow overlight, 4'-10" x 6" with curved leading and eight rosettes. The door itself is 32-1/2" wide, now painted matte black; the original ward lock key plate is in place. The present kitchen door is 32-1/2" wide, nine lights over two panels. East of the door is a three-pane sidelight with a wooden panel below. The glass door of the second ell room has 15 lights; the door of the rear ell room has four lights over four panels.
- b. Windows and shutters: Old windows on the house are six-over-six sash, and are found throughout, except as noted below. (Second-floor windows are smaller than those on the first floor.) The two first-floor east windows are eight-light casement, apparently cut down further than the original opening. In the third room of the ell, first floor, there is a large metal-framed 32-light window; in the second room of the ell, second floor, there are two small eight-

HABS  
DC  
GEO  
117-

light casement windows. The first room of the ell, second floor, has a six-light single-sash window. The sills of all windows are wooden.

Most windows of the house have--or had--wooden shutters. Most are of fixed-louver type; at the side and back some are solid, three panel. Except for one window, the ell has no shutters. There are two forms of shutter stops: one with a palmette-like weight; the other, a swirl.

8. Roof:

- a. Shape, covering: The house has a north-south gable roof covered with standing seam metal, painted red. The ell has a single-pitch shed roof, rising from south to north, similarly covered in metal.
- b. Cornice, eaves: There is a metal gutter with large downspouts on the lower slope of each roof. On the house there is a slight return of the box cornice at the gable ends (apparently containing the gutter), but along the gable ends there is no gutter and the roof edge is finished in flush metal flashing.
- c. Dormers, cupolas, towers: None. In the south gable end of the house there is a half-round louvered ventilating opening.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans: The first floor is of center hall plan, with two rooms on each side. The center hall is divided by a doorway about 2' beyond the mid point; in the rear section of the hall is the stair to the second floor, and a door into the ell. Each of the side rooms is entered by a door from the hall. The two on the south side are connected by a wide doorway; those on the north, by a regular-sized opening. The ell, which is one step lower than the main part of the house, contains first a kitchen, followed by a room called the "school room"--now used as a summer dining room--with the rear stairway in the northeast corner. In the northwest corner is an added closet, containing a toilet. The third room of the ell, added last, is one step lower still.

The second floor of the main house has a central hall--with bathroom at the east end--and two rooms on either side. The two rooms to the south are joined by a doorway. In the ell, reached by two steps from the front stair landing, is a room which contains the rear stairs to the

first floor, a bathroom, and a large closet; next there is a small bedroom; and, one step lower, an unfinished storage room.

The attic (which was not inspected) is reached through a small trap door in the ceiling of the upper hallway.

The basement extends only under the hall and the southern two rooms of the house. There is a crawl space under the northern two rooms.

2. Stairways: The hall stair is a half turn with landing (run of ten, then five). The risers are 7-1/4" and the pine tread is 29-1/2" wide. From the landing against the west wall are two 6-1/2" risers to the rear ell. On the main stair the stringer edges are decorated with volutes. The simple turned newel and two 1" x 3/4" balusters per tread support a handrail of nearly circular section. The rear stair from the second room of the ell is a quarter turn with winders. There are eleven 8-1/2" risers, with the first three winders. The pine treads, 30" wide and unpainted, show considerable wear. (The second winder, for example, is worn almost completely through.)

The cellar is reached by a quarter-turn wooden stair of eleven open risers and one landing near the bottom. It does not appear to be particularly old.

3. Flooring: The pine flooring on the first floor--generally 5-1/4" to 6-3/4" wide--is considerably worn in several places. It runs east-to-west. The floor joists, visible in the basement, measure 2-1/2" x 9-1/2" and are 17" on center. There is some modern reinforcing and bracing. On the second floor, the pine flooring is wider, generally 7-3/4" with some 4-3/4" wide. This runs north-to-south. Where visible through cracks in the flooring, the joists are 3" thick; at one point, near the northwest bedroom door, two joists are spaced only about 1-1/4" apart.

In the ell, the kitchen floor is covered with plastic tile; the second room has pine boards (painted red), running east-west, and from 2-1/2" to 11-1/4" wide. The westernmost room has 2-3/8" pine flooring, running north-to-south. On the second floor the pine flooring varies from 5" to 7-3/4", and runs east-to-west. The storeroom floors are unfinished pine, with boards from 4" to 7" wide. The basement has a modern concrete floor.

4. Wall and ceiling finish: In the main house, the walls on the first floor are plasterboard; on the second floor, plaster. All are painted a light yellow.

HABS  
DC  
GEO  
117-

The dividing wall between the two southern rooms has no joist doubling or other support in the basement; projecting stud ends are simply attached to the joist they are above. Ceilings are plaster, painted white.

In the ell, the kitchen has plaster walls--except for the west wall, which is a thin 1" vertical board partition. Most of this boarding is 6" wide, single bead; some is 2-3/4". In the second room, the east wall is the reverse of this boarding, and the rear stair in the northeast corner is boxed in with vertical boarding, 11-3/4" and 13-3/4" wide. Walls are plaster. The northwest closet wall is 3-1/4" vertical boarding, each board having two one-bead strips. The closet in the southwest corner is made of 10" and 11" wide boards. The walls of the westernmost room are either clapboard (7" on the east, 3-1/2" on the south) or flush boarding as on the west or north (some 10" and 11" wide). The ceilings of the first two rooms are plaster, while the third room has open joists, 2-3/4" thick and 7-3/4" deep, 25" on center. On the second floor of the ell, the walls of the first room are plaster, with a 5" baseboard, except for the bathroom in the northeast portion, which has vertical boarding, and a wainscoting about 4' high. The west wall of the room is vertical boarding, 11-1/2" to 12-3/4" wide, with one bead (painted white). In the second room, a bedroom, the walls are plaster, except the east wall which is of boarding. The rear attic room is unfinished, the walls constructed of 2-3/4" studs 24" on center. The east wall is clapboarding, 5-1/2" to 7-1/4" wide. The roof also is exposed here, with 3" x 4" rafters, 29" on center. The roof for the entire ell slopes up from south to north.

5. Doorways and doors: Most of the doors in the house are six-panel wood, both first and second floor. In the ell, some doors are four-panel, others simply vertical boarding. Double folding doors between the south rooms have been removed, and are stored in the basement. All doorways have a decorative molding surround. The first floor has two types, which seem to indicate some 19th-century remodeling. A simple molding, which seems earlier, is 3-1/2" wide with miter joints. It is found on the west side of the mid-hall doorway, and on the hallway side of the two doorways into the westernmost rooms, north and south of the hall. A more elaborate molding, which appears to be a later addition, is formed of 6"-wide jamb strips with a vertical recessed strip or panel, square plinth blocks the height of the baseboard, and corner blocks with an attractive rosette applique. These enframements extend up above the actual door openings, leaving an 8" space of wall as a sort of plaster panel above the door. This treatment is found on the east side

HABS  
DC  
GEO  
117-

of the hall doorway and all the door openings in the southern two rooms. On the second floor, all doorways have a very simple 1-3/4" molding.

In the ell, moldings are simple, 1-3/4", 2" or 3". Some doors have simple wooden strips instead. The westernmost room, first floor, has 4-1/2" molding of more recent date.

6. Decorative features and trim: The only decorative features other than the door trim are the window trim and chair rail. On the south side of the house, the window trim is identical to the later, more elaborate door trim; it is also carried down to the baseboard, thus forming a plaster panel below the window sill, and above the baseboard. The rooms on the north side of the hall have simple trim, which is not carried down to the floor. Second-floor window trim is also simple. In the dining room there is a molded chair rail 3' from the floor. Ceiling molding is found only in the two east bedrooms of the second floor; this is very simple, 1-1/2" wide molding.
7. Notable hardware: There are several forms of old lock boxes on the first and second floors. Some have a bar which is elevated by turning the brass knob; others, a rounded tongue. The boxes are of two companies: the first bears an oval seal which reads: "T. Carpenters Patent//a British crest//J. Tildeslay Licensee." The box measures 4-3/8" x 5"; five are located on the first floor. A variant, with a round seal, but measuring 4-1/4" x 5" is also present. One example of a second make of lock is found upstairs, and its circular seal reads: "No. /figure of standing lion/ 60/R. Halldorn/Late Badger & Co." This box measures 4-1/4" x 6". The remainder of the locks upstairs are very simple, of the tongue-blade type, and bear no seals: they measure 4-1/8" x 3-1/2". All hinges in the house are plain, except for those on the cellar door and the west hall door: these have an embossed scroll plate.
8. Lighting: All fixtures are modern.
9. Heating: There is a mantel in each of the four front rooms of the house: each is very plain, composed of molding strips in a simple Federal form. That in the southeast room measures 4'-8" wide x 4'-3" tall, with a plain broad mantel shelf 7-1/8" x 4'-5", and 1-3/8" thick. The other three are almost identical to this. In the basement, the two south fireplaces are supported by brick piers, with a 3" thick wooden lintel connecting the two, rather than a brick arch. The brickwork of the dining room

HABS  
DC  
GEO  
117-

mantel is bordered by an additional wooden molding insert. On the second floor, the four fireplaces are very simple: the one in the northeast bedroom is similar to those on the first floor, but a cast-iron coal grate decorated with Ionic half-columns and leaf and vine patterns has been inserted. Above the grate opening is the label: "Rock Furnace." The other mantelpieces are plain, with two mantel shelves--the second shelf 9-1/4" below the other.

In the ell, there is a large fireplace in the second first-floor room. It is very plain, with two side pilasters supporting a wide, flat architrave 14-1/2" wide, and a mantel shelf 11" x 5'-10" long. The fire opening is 31" x 35-1/2", with modern brickwork. In the rear room is a brick chimney at the north wall, 17-1/2" square, with a stove-pipe opening bricked up. In the attic this chimney curves to the east to avoid a rafter, but has since been cut down at roof level.

Modern heating is with an oil furnace and steam heat.

D. Site:

1. General setting and orientation: The house is set back from the sidewalk about 20', facing east onto 28th Street. There is a yard to the side, and an ample garden to the rear.
2. Enclosures: The front yard has a wood and wire fence at the sidewalk, with a white picket gate. To the north is a modern picket fence, and the neighbor's brick wall, which extends to the west. To the south is a wire fence running the length of the property. In the rear at the west line is a board fence; an 8' high wooden fence screens the adjoining yard to the north.
3. Walks: The front walk is brick laid in a chevron pattern. To the south is a brick basketweave walk leading to a rear patio which measures about 12' x 18'. A brick walk leads from the patio to the rear of the ell.
4. Landscaping: The grounds are heavily planted with box, ivy, great numbers of climbing roses, wisteria, iris, and petunias. In the rear yard, at the south fence, is a huge maple tree, about 4' in diameter.

Prepared by Daniel D. Reiff  
Architectural Historian  
Commission of Fine Arts  
July 1969

HABS  
DC  
GEO  
117-

PART III. PROJECT INFORMATION

These records were made in 1969 during a project to record 14 structures and a group of 16 items of "street furniture" in the Georgetown section of Washington, D. C. The project was conducted by the Commission of Fine Arts with the cooperation of the Historic American Buildings Survey. The resulting documentation was donated to HABS by the Commission and published in 1970 in HABS Selections Number 10, Georgetown Architecture: Northwest Washington, District of Columbia.

The project was under the direction of Mr. Charles H. Atherton, Executive Secretary and Administrative Officer of the Commission of Fine Arts. The recording team was composed of Miss Ellen J. Schwartz and Mr. Daniel D. Reiff, Architectural Historians, and Mr. William P. Thompson, Architect. The photographs were made by photographers J. Alexander and Jack E. Boucher under contract to the Commission.